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ABSTRACT

Research on justice has taken many directions. What people see as just and unjust, how they react to perceived injustice, and what principles of justice are preferred in different contexts are some of the questions that have been posed in the literature. Less time has been spent on the related questions of whether people change over time in these respects and, if they do, whether researchers can discover the nature of the experiences that bring such changes to pass. When considering social justice, the beliefs that participants have about one another's group attributes often modify what otherwise might be seen as fair or unfair. This study summarizes the findings of studies that examined the effects of personal association among members of dominant and subordinate groups on beliefs about discriminatory social policies. Two studies focused on the attitudes of white tenants who shared federally funded apartment buildings with blacks. Two laboratory experiments examined the attitudes of whites thrown together with blacks in a working situation in which they shared equal responsibility. It appears that the more one is identified with others in an ingroup sense, the more one is likely to behave toward others in ways consistent with the equality principle of distributive justice. Changing negative stereotypes toward subordinate groups could also have a positive effect in terms of modifying the justification of biased applications of justice. A 13-item bibliography is included. (JB)

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Extending the Equality Principle to
Victims of Social Injustice

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EXTENDING THE EQUALITY PRINCIPLE TO THE
VICTIMS OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Research on justice has taken many directions. We have asked what people see as just and unjust, how they react to perceived injustice, what principles of justice are preferred in different contexts, and so on. We have been aware of, but have spent less time on, the related question of whether people change over time in these respects. Do they consider a given distribution of benefits to be just at one point in time but later think of it as unjust? Is a procedure for deciding on a distribution of benefits, once seen as fair, later judged to be unfair? And, if so, can justice researchers discover the nature of experiences that bring such changes to pass?

I am going to examine the question of potential change in the application of justice principles in the special case of social justice. By social justice I shall mean allocations of benefits and rights in which representatives of both a dominant and a subordinate social category are involved. These might be such categories as upper class and lower class, ethnic majority and ethnic minority and, in many contexts, men and women.

Social justice, defined in this way, is a special case in the sense that it adds to the usual considerations underlying the implementation of justice principles, the beliefs that participants have about one another's group attributes. These beliefs often modify what otherwise might have been seen as fair or unfair. Let me remind you of a few familiar examples.

The first comes from the area of economic exchange. In economic matters, people usually prefer the principle of proportionality or equity, under which relative outcomes should match relative contributions. Judgments of the relative worth of contributions, such as the amount and quality of work performed, must often be subjective. When persons from a single social

category are being compared, judgments of the worth of their contributions are free to focus on the relative amount and quality of work performed. However, when the comparisons involve members of dominant and subordinate groups, the judgment is influenced not only by the work itself, but by beliefs about characteristics of the workers. Thus, the farmer who does agricultural work in his own country may judge the worth of his or her work to be greater than that of the migrant worker and feel unjustly treated if not paid correspondingly more. The same may be true of whites doing work similar to that done by blacks, and of men comparing their work to that of women. To dominant group members, inequitable arrangements of this sort often appear to be just and are typically buttressed by justifications having to do with inferior qualities of the subordinate group.

The second example involves social benefits like freedom of choice and individual rights. The principle of fair distribution found to be preferred by judges in such contexts is that of equality. Again, however, when freedoms and rights are restricted for subordinate social categories, dominant group members often fail to see this as an injustice. Familiar instances of this in the history of the United States have been restrictions on the right to vote, limited access to places of residence, and ineligibility for certain occupations and religious roles. What has subjectively legitimized such injustice has been the justification that the subordinate group is inferior in such respects as ability, motivation, knowledge, religious status, or morals.

Sometimes, the ideal of justice calls for the allocation of current resources to compensate for the residual effect upon members of a subordinate group of past injustice to a preceding generation of this group. This provides an additional opportunity for subjective judgment to affect the implementation of justice principles. To many black Americans with a history

of slavery and of subsequent educational and occupational discrimination, compensatory consideration for past deprivation will seem a relevant input to decisions about current allocations. While some members of dominant groups will share this perception, for others, contemporary allocations of resources will seem fair only if based on relative merit within the current generation.

Before considering the possibility of changing beliefs and actions in the area of justice it would be prudent to consider, first, some hard-headed warnings from analysts who have given the matter much thought. In 1975, William Walster and Elaine Hatfield Walster put it this way, "There seems to be little chance that the majority will recognize the claims of exploited minorities unless these minorities can amass sufficient power to enforce their demands for equal treatment" (Walster & Walster, 1975). And, in another statement, they say, "Unless the minority has some real power to affect the outcomes of the majority, the case seems hopeless." A possible inference from this is that attempts to change unjust practices or the beliefs about outgroups that legitimize such practices would be futile. Instead, what would have to be changed is the strongly-held commitment to protect the dominant group's self-interest and social power.

I am going to suggest an alternative to this view. This is that by promoting respect and liking for lower status outgroups we may at the same time bring them under the umbrella of the equality principle of social justice. To illustrate this, let me begin with some personal experiences. Some years ago--as a matter of fact, some decades ago--I became interested in beliefs that supported social injustice. Initially, my attention was drawn to such beliefs as an aspect of my research on intergroup relations. This was just after World War II, when I was working with other social psychologists,

first in a research institute that Kurt Lewin had founded at the American Jewish Congress, and later in the Research Center for Human Relations at New York University.

The substantive question that we decided to focus on was, to a considerable extent, a function of the times. Social psychologists of the period had become somewhat pessimistic about the power of information and persuasion to change strongly entrenched social behavior. By contrast, they had become quite curious about the potential of social interaction in this regard. To some extent I expect this curiosity reflected the then-dominant influence of learning theory in psychology. It was appealing to think of social interaction as a kind of social learning experience.

In this atmosphere, those of us at the American Jewish Congress began to study the effect of personal association between members of dominant and subordinate groups on beliefs about discriminatory social policies. At the time, equal access to housing for blacks was rare. Agreements among homeowners to restrict sales to whites were legal. Rental apartments were free to deny access to blacks. Even though publicly subsidized rental housing was being made available to blacks, the responsible federal agency required separation of black tenants from white tenants. Few whites questioned the justice of such regulations.

Somewhat ironically, it was a change in the funding practices of this same federal agency that created the opportunity for two quasi-experiments in field settings. What happened was that the agency for the first time began to fund housing developments that housed both white and black tenants. Consequently, for a number of years it was possible to compare the social policy preferences of white tenants who shared apartment buildings with blacks to those who lived in identical apartments under segregated conditions. In

other instances, comparisons could be made between white tenants who lived quite close to black tenants, and those who lived in the same housing development but so far away that they had no association with black tenants.

We took advantage of this transition period to study the influence of cross-racial personal association on change in beliefs, feelings and policy preferences. This included preferences about housing policy--specifically, whether blacks and whites should have equal access to all public housing in the future. This type of cross-racial association, unlike most interracial contact prevalent at the time, cast whites and blacks in equal status in the contact situation, that is, in their place of residence.

Unfortunately, I cannot take the time to describe our methodology. I should note, however, that we were protected from the danger that less prejudiced whites would choose the more desegregated apartments by a severe post-war housing shortage that created long waiting lists, and by an apartment assignment policy that required applicants to take what they were assigned when their names came up, or leave the list. Rarely was an apartment not accepted. I should note also that staff members, posing as opinion pollsters, interviewed tenants in their apartments.

In the first of these two studies, conducted by Morton Deutsch and Mary Collins, we found that half of the white tenants who had lived in housing developments with blacks endorsed a policy of equal and unrestricted access to future public housing (Deutsch & Collins, 1951). Since only five percent of whites who lived in segregated projects endorsed such a policy, it was inferred that a substantial number of those who had had cross-racial associations had changed their views. The nature of the change had been to extend the implications of the equality principle to members of an outgroup

not previously included under that principle, at least with respect to freedom of residence.

The results of the second quasi-experiment, conducted by Daniel Wilner and Rosabelle Walkley, were in the same direction, but not as extensive (Wilner, Walkley & Cook, 1955). In this study, almost one-third of tenants from the desegregated housing projects endorsed equal racial access to future public housing. The most likely explanation of the difference between the two studies is the difference in the proportion of blacks--and hence the number of opportunities for white/black association--in the housing developments of the two studies. While it ranged from 40% to 70% black in the Deutsch study, it was only 10% black in the Wilner study.

I have only enough time to give a much oversimplified interpretation of these findings. Internal analyses of other data in the studies suggested the following. Some white tenants were led by their greater residential proximity to blacks to have more frequent and more cooperative cross-racial associations. In addition, their observations of similar cross-racial exchanges among other tenants led them to perceive a peer norm supporting equal status interracial associations. As a consequence of these experiences, many tenants came to endorse equal access to housing for blacks in the future --that is, to change their view of social justice for blacks in this area of life.

I followed the field studies with two laboratory experiments (Cook, 1969; Cook & Wrightsman, 1971). The second of these was a replication of the first and was carried out after a lapse of three years. Both were conducted with the collaboration of Lawrence Wrightsman. As in the field studies, the overall purpose was to discover when, if ever, personal association of dominant with subordinate group members led to more positive intergroup

relations. Also as in the field studies, a special focus of interest was on the possibility that cross-racial association would be followed by a change in endorsement of greater equality in the distribution of social benefits like education, jobs, and access to positions of leadership and status.

As a context for the experiments, a simulated business was created. The subject, a white to whom inequality for blacks seemed appropriate, was employed to fill one of three equally responsible roles in this business. Only after being trained for the work, but not yet having been paid for it, did the subject discover on the first business day that one of the co-workers was black. The latter, and a second co-worker who was white, were trained confederates.

In this context it was possible to provide the subject with an experience analogous to that in the housing studies. The experience included equality of status in the contact situation, cooperation in the task of running the business, acquaintance with a member of a subordinate group, exposure to a white peer who endorsed racial equality, and exposure to a black associate who did not conform to familiar, negative stereotypes. The business team worked together for two hours a day for twenty days.

Again, time prevents me from describing our methods. I should note three critical points, however. The first is that all social interaction over the twenty days was guided by the task and the confederates. Hence, the experience of all subjects was highly similar. Second, some of the racially prejudiced potential subjects were assigned to a non-treated control group and tested on the same schedule as that employed with the subjects. Third, there was a complete separation of measurement of the criterion variables from the experimental setting in location, personnel, and time. Pretests and post-tests were administered by persons never seen at the experimental location.

They occurred at a different place in the city. Pretests were taken about two weeks in advance of participation, and post-tests from one to three months after participation. Criterion measures were buried in a battery of measures that required ten to twelve hours to complete in two sittings.

As in the field studies, the outcomes of interest to this discussion are beliefs about equal access for blacks to business services, education, occupation, political leadership, and so on. On a composite measure of such beliefs, the research subjects in both the initial experiment and the replication changed more than the controls from pretest to post-test in the equal access direction.

Again, a number of interpretations are possible. One that has some appeal to me postulates change in two stages. The first is that positive affect from the successful completion of the cooperative task attaches to the black confederate--a spread of affect from one component of a rewarding experience to another. But this is not sufficient to bring about generalization to social justice for blacks as a group. This occurs in a second stage in which the white confederate teammate repeatedly associates unfair treatment of blacks with mistreatment of the subject's newly acquired black friend.

My point in reviewing the results of these four studies for you is to contrast them with the point of view that I illustrated with the quote from Walster and Walster. This, you recall, is that a redistribution of economic and social power must precede the behavioral implementation of social justice. Their diagnosis--and that of other justice researchers--is that justice principles are often used to mask and preserve a distribution of resources that serves the interests of those in power. This may be true, but it appears clear that people can and do change their beliefs about social

justice on the basis of experiences that do not involve a redistribution of power. It could be argued, of course, that we should interpret "redistribution of power" not only in general societal terms but also as applying to specific situations. In the latter sense it could be said that, in the experiments I described, we did in fact expose subjects to a miniaturized and temporary redistribution of social power. We did this by putting dominant group members for the first time in their lives into situations in which they shared equal power with their counterparts from a subordinate group.

This brings me to the general question underlying my comments: Can we develop a psychology of the processes by which justice principles might be extended to all subordinate and powerless groups? Might we illuminate the processes underlying bias in justice beliefs and, having done so, use this knowledge to discover how to promote the conditions that favor the extension of justice to the victims of injustice? I have cast about for leads that seem encouraging to such an undertaking. Three come to mind. I am sure that others will occur to you.

The first is suggested by the discovery that the more one feels similar, congenial, or cooperative with others, or, alternatively, is identified with them in the ingroup sense, the more is one likely to behave toward them in ways consistent with the equality principle of distributive justice. Morton Deutsch has put it this way, "The scope of applicability of one's concepts of justice is determined by the scope of one's perceived community" (Deutsch, 1985, pp. 36-37). Similarly, Lerner and Lerner have described a category of social relationships that they call "unit relations" (Lerner & Lerner, 1981, p. 49). This category is characterized by feelings of similarity, of helpfulness, and of belonging together. The Lerner's note that people with

unit relations treat one another in accord with the principles of equality and proportionality. Lawrence Messé has shown that research subjects follow the principle of proportionality more closely when allocating rewards to an in-group than to an out-group member (Messé, Hymes, & MacCoun, 1984).

The inference I draw from the above is that if we could move people from feeling dissimilar and unrelated, to a sense of greater similarity and social connection, we should observe a more even application of justice principles. An implication of this position is that we might take an indirect path to enhancing social justice, namely by emphasizing the study of those factors that enhance positive relationships. Recent research seems to me to follow this pattern. Investigators have found that procedures such as enhancing the perceived similarity of outgroup to ingroup members, or promoting acquisition of individuating information about outgroup members, reduce the likelihood that ingroup members will see outgroups as homogeneous and characterize them with negative stereotypes (Wilder, 1978; Locksley et al., 1980).

The second lead has two roots. One is the ever-present emphasis in justice research on the function of justification in legitimizing unjust behavior. The other is the promising resurgence of research on stereotypes. As related to social justice, these two come together as follows: Justification of biased applications of justice to subordinate groups takes the form of discounting their contributions as inferior or, in other ways, unworthy. Such justifications seem parallel to, if not identical with, those negative stereotypes that function to rationalize aversive treatment of outgroups in other spheres, such as discrimination in employment. Here the economic advantage of restricting access to jobs is masked by stereotypes regarding undesirable characteristics of lower status individuals. Given this similarity between justifications and stereotypes, the fact that students of

cognitive processes are studying ways to modify stereotypes could have implications as well for modifying justifications of bias in the area of justice.

The third lead is suggested by the analogy between belief in a justice principle, on the one hand, and dispositions like values, ideological beliefs, or internal normative standards, on the other. Social psychologists have long been studying ways of making behavior more consistent with such dispositions. Hence, research on ways to make justice-related behavior more consistent with justice principles would have as background the progress made in research on enhancing the consistency of behavior with attitude and the consistency of conduct with personal moral standards. For example, studies have identified a number of quite similar interventions that lead behavior to become more consistent with attitudes and ideals. One of these is when steps are taken to enhance self-awareness in attitudinal areas that are related to impending action choices (Wicklund, 1975; Reis & Burns, 1982). Another is communication to enhance the perceived relevance of attitude to a potential attitude-related action (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). A third is to make more evident to individuals the way that particular actions reflect on the credibility of their professed beliefs (Salancik, 1982).

In summary, I have suggested arguments for the worth of research on determinants of change away from biased application of justice principles to subordinate and powerless groups. The original discussions of distributive justice by George Homans and Stacy Adams date back only 25 years. Thus, in a very short period of time we have evolved an impressive account of the psychology of justice. In the years to come, I look forward to an equally vigorous and effective development of the psychology of improving justice.

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